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MYSTICISM AND RELIGION¹

The task of a monograph by Fresenius is to differentiate the religious attitude from those tendencies which the writer believes to be peculiar to mysticism. Any attempt to define mysticism, as the author notes, is beset with difficulties arising from the bulk and elusiveness of the material and the varieties of temperament and interest of the mystical writers. He limits his problem by using modern sources, and by holding to the theme: "Is there a mystical root of all religious experience?" Obviously this question is answered by defining carefully what is meant by mysticism, by religion, and by appealing to history and biography.

Analysis is first made of three important inquiries into the mystical factor in religion: Friedrich von Hügel's *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in St. Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*; Nathan Söderblom's *Religionsproblemet inom Katolicism och Protestantism*, and George Klepl's *Zur Umbildung des religiösen Denkens*. Von Hügel, from the Catholic standpoint, finds that mysticism supplies the fresh currents of insight and piety which religion needs to unstiffen the rigidity of cult and doctrine. Mysticism is therefore historically an essential element of religion, affording expression for feeling and will (pp. 5, 26, 27, 52). Söderblom discusses the evangelical Protestant type. In opposition to the mediaeval mystic, with his passion for the changeless and the absolute, he finds the distinguishing trait of genuine mysticism in obedience to conscience with its majesty and unconditional character, in warfare for the dignity of the individual. The seeming irrationality of categorical imperatives is overcome in a feeling attitude, in the case of the "conscience-personality" type of mystic embodied in Lutheranism and theorized by Kant (pp. 30, 31). For Klepl there is another type of mysticism which comes from new sources of feeling and appreciation in inner life and outer nature stimulated by the alien character of the categories of religion and the mechanizing of modern science (pp. 42, 54). These three types of mysticism are analyzed by the author and used as a basis for his own construction. The view of Söderblom is similar to his conclusions, with the exception that what Söderblom calls mysticism is, more properly, evidence of religious piety.

The essence of religion is ethical, according to Fresenius; it is the living experience which the morally thoughtful man has, when he encounters the might of the good and gives himself up wholly to it (p. 53). It means strife, individual conviction, the search for inde-

¹ *Mystik und geschichtliche Religion: eine systematische Untersuchung*. Von Wilhelm Fresenius. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1912. 101 pages.

pendent personality through ideals, not through cult, active contact with persons, and a faith which is consciously embraced (pp. 63-66). From this standpoint, which is taken to be the historical one of the Protestant reformers, the author reviews the types of mysticism. His charges against the primacy of the mystical attitude as ordinarily conceived are that mysticism is vague, inarticulate, mere feeling for the Ultimate, Absolute, Infinite, and Unchangeable; it is non-ethical, discounting the individual personality and moral struggle in a human community; it is opposed to any definite historical religion, since it sets up a capricious feeling in opposition to organized rational institutions and doctrines; it is an aestheticism, a mere worship of nature and the world; it is a strife against religion rather than part of religion itself.

The conclusion is that mysticism as such is non-progressive, non-rational, and in conflict with the practical moral earnestness of the religious spirit. The author intimates that the increasing interest in the claims of mysticism is likely to be harmful to the historical faith. "Historical religion" appears to be identified with the formulation made by Luther, and several pages are devoted to proof that there is no real mystical element in Luther's writings.

There is no attempt to indicate the psychological character of feeling and its function in the organization of the self. Since the enthusiastic, independent, judging personality is the central point of the argument, it seems important to explain under what conditions, from the angles of psychological genesis and institutional background, new moral and religious conceptions come into existence.

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THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT

In a recent volume¹ the author seeks to establish the following thesis: "Darwinian fitness is compounded of a mutual relationship between the organism and the environment. Of this, fitness of environment is quite as essential a component as the fitness which arises in the process of organic evolution; and in fundamental characteristics the actual environment is the fittest possible abode of life." The author approaches his problem from the point of view of physical chemistry, admittedly the only novel feature of the hypothesis. With the marshal-

¹ *The Fitness of the Environment. An Inquiry into the Biological Significance of the Properties of Matter.* By Lawrence J. Henderson. In part delivered as lectures in the Lowell Institute, February, 1913. New York: Macmillan, 1913. xv+317 pages. \$1.50 net.